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ABSTRACT

Edward Fry's Graph for Estimating Readability (Extended) was used to determine the approximate readability levels of books within the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" series. The findings indicated that the levels of readability did not remain the same throughout each series, with the Nancy Drew series ranging in reading levels from fourth through seventh grades and the Hardy Boys and "Little House" series ranging from fourth through sixth grade reading levels. (FL)

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A Comparison of the Readability Levels of Selected
Books in the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" Series

by
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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Kean College of New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the readability levels of books within the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" series. Fry's Graph for Estimating Readability--Extended was the sole means of determining approximate readability levels. Upon application of Fry's Graph, it was determined that the levels of readability do not remain the same throughout the series.

These findings can be of importance to the teacher who is making recommendations to students for free reading materials. Although not the sole factor to be considered, the readability level should be known to the teacher before suggesting any book, especially to the remedial student.

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The knowledge of the readability levels of the free reading materials such as the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, or "Little House" series is useful to a number of people. It is, most importantly, needed by the author of such material. The stories written can be of any chosen level. The author will know if the stories are reaching the audience for whom they were intended. Bormuth (1968) states that more recent readability researchers have sought to "not only predict the difficulty of materials but also to write the materials to have any level of difficulty we choose." The classroom or reading teacher must also be aware of the readability levels of these books so they can be suggested as pleasurable free reading materials to the students. Great success can be achieved by the disabled reader if the book can be completed on the reader's independent reading level.

As noted by Klare (1974-1975), there are over thirty readability formulas which can be used to estimate the reading grade level of written materials. He has detailed many of the more recent formulas and their revisions which can be applied to children's materials. Some of these are the Devereaux, the Botel, the Fry Readability Graph, the Mugford Readability Chart, and the Harris-Jacobsen Readability Formulas.

Readability levels of children's trade books cannot be determined only by the application of a readability formula. A major factor of the book's readability is the child's comprehension of what has been read. Other factors which help

make a selection readable for a specific group are legibility, interest or ease of reading or, more specifically, a combination of these (Dale and Chall, 1949). Fry (1975) has stated that "matching the level of the student with the level of the material" is the basic purpose of assigning readability levels to any book.

HYPOTHESIS

Since series such as those chosen for evaluation are generally used with fourth through sixth graders (Arbutnot and Sutherland, 1972 and Cooper, 1965), it is desirable to know whether all materials in a series are at the same level or whether the materials vary, providing either difficulty for the unwary reader or appropriate challenge for growth. It was hypothesized that the readability levels of books in the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" series did not remain the same throughout the series.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

It was assumed that the Fry Readability Formula is a valid, reliable method for estimating readability levels since Klare (1974-1975) indicates that no one formula can guarantee accuracy in determining grade level, but that "Fry's graph has been validated on both primary and secondary materials, and the score derived from it correlates highly with those from several well-known formulas."

Joseph C. Kretschmer (1976) updated Fry's formula by applying a correction formula, listing fifty two and three

syllable words to be counted as one syllable words. He reported that the application of this correction formula brings about "increased accuracy" and that, furthermore, the readability levels obtained with the Fry formula with correction were "more in line with the Dale-Chall and Spache estimates."

Klare further recommended the Fry Readability Graph as "a way of saving the user's time and effort." Edward Fry (1977) stated that the "Readability Graph's contribution seems to be simplicity of use without sacrificing much, if any, accuracy and its wide range from grade one up through college."

Only the Fry Readability Graph was used to determine the readability levels of the specified books, following Fry's updated directions.

Not all volumes in the Nancy Drew or Hardy Boys series were utilized. Those books chosen were those which were published at five year intervals following the first book in the series. It is assumed that those chosen books were representative of the entire series.

PROCEDURES

The "Little House", Nancy Drew, and Hardy Boys books were chosen for this study because of their popularity not only as free reading materials but also as television programs.

In the case of the "Little House" books, all volumes were used. In both the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series,

books were chosen in the following manner. Volume one was selected in each series. Using Books in Print, Author volumes, 1977 edition, remaining books were chosen which had been published at five year intervals from the original volume. The dates of publication were then verified through use of the copyright dates which appear in each book. As some books listed only the current copyright date, earlier Books in Print and Children's Books in Print were used to confirm original dates of publication.

Based on this method of selection, eight "Little House," ten Nancy Drew, and eleven Hardy Boys books were chosen for the readability study.

The Fry Readability Formula was then applied to each book. Three one hundred word passages were randomly selected from each book. The number of syllables in each selection as well as the number of whole and partial sentences were counted. Using Fry's "Graph for Estimating Readability--Extended", the average sentence length and average number of syllables were plotted. The area in which these points intersected gave the approximate grade level of that book. A comparison of grade levels of the books in each series was then made in order to determine whether or not the readability levels varies within each series.

The following books were utilized:

Dixon, Franklin W.		-- Hardy Boys --
Vol. 1	The Tower Treasure	1927
11	While the Clock Ticked	1932
16	A Figure in Hiding	1937
21	The Clue of the Broken Blade	1942
26	The Phantom Freighter	1947
31	The Secret of Wildcat Swamp	1952
36	The Secrets of Pirates' Hill	1957
41	The Clue of the Screeching Owl	1962
46	The Secret Agent on Flight 101	1967
51	The Masked Monkey	1972
56	The Jungle Pyramid	1977
Keene, Carolyn		-- Nancy Drew --
Vol. 1	The Secret of the Old Clock	1930
12	The Message in the Hollow Oak	1935
17	The Mystery of the Brass Bound Trunk	1940
22	The Clue in the Crumbling Wall	1945
27	The Secret of the Wooden Lady	1950
33	The Witch Tree Symbol	1955
37	The Clue in the Old Stagecoach	1960
43	The Mystery of the 99 Steps	1965
47	The Mysterious Mannequin	1970
52	The Secret of the Forgotten City	1975
Wilder, Laura Ingalls		-- Little House --
Vol. 1	Little House in the Big Woods	1932
2	Little House on the Prairie	1935
3	Farmer Boy	1933
4	On the Banks of Plum Creek	1937
5	By the Shores of Silver Lake	1939
6	The Long Winter	1940
7	Little Town on the Prairie	1941
8	These Happy Golden Years	1943

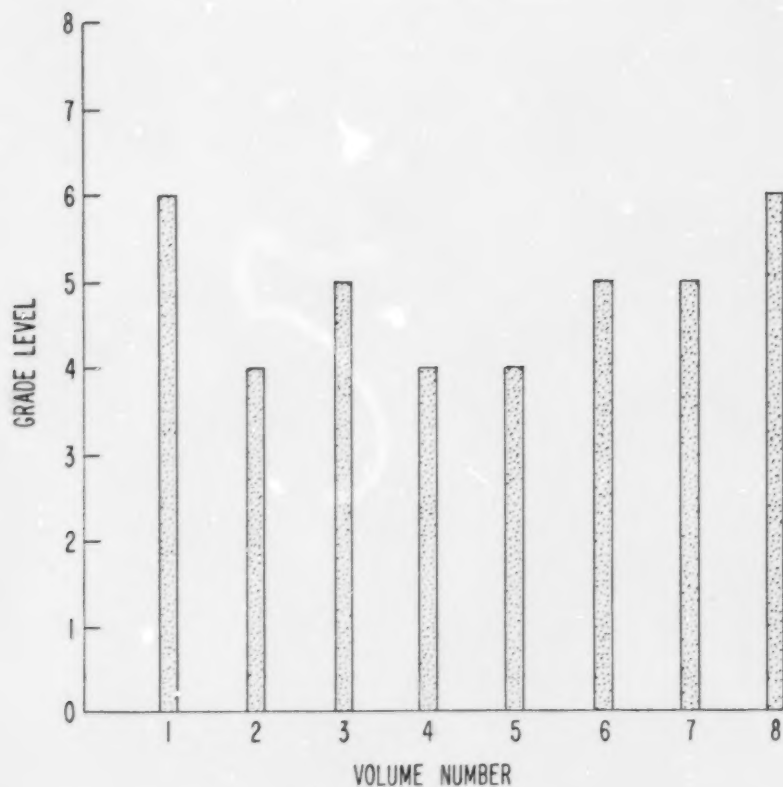
RESULTS

The three charts which follow illustrate the approximate reading grade levels of the selected Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" books when the Fry Readability Formula is applied. As indicated by the charts, the Nancy Drew series ranges in reading grade levels from fourth through seventh grades, while the Hardy Boys and "Little House" series range from fourth through sixth grade reading levels.

CONCLUSIONS

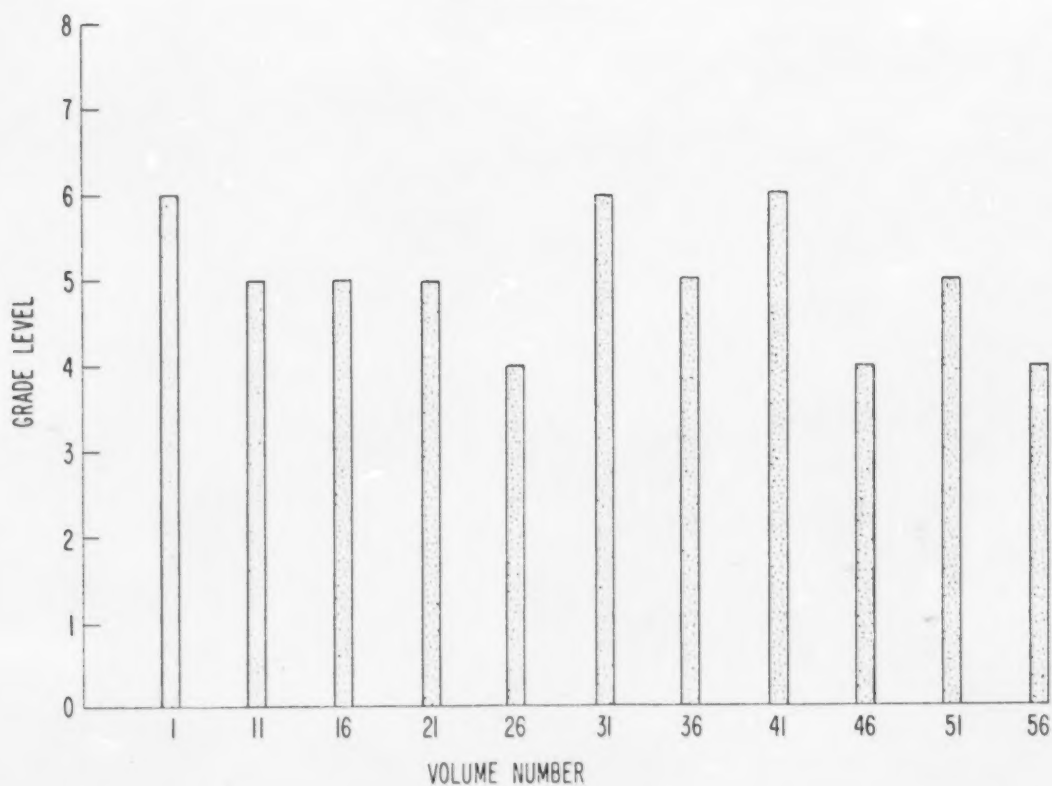
It can be concluded that the readability levels of books within the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and "Little House" series do not remain the same. It can be further concluded that these books could be appropriate for the upper elementary grade reader when the child's reading grade level is taken into consideration. This should be an important factor to keep in mind when making recommendations for books for students to enjoy for free reading activities. However, it is not the readability level alone that makes a book suitable for the reader. Dale and Chall (1949) refer to the 1935 Gray and Leary survey of librarians, teachers, and publishers. It was agreed that the major factor of what makes a book readable is its contents. Comprehension is another important factor. "When there is strong interest in the subject matter, more effort is put forth and there is a greater amount of understanding." Fry (1975) agrees that "high motivation

"LITTLE HOUSE" SERIES



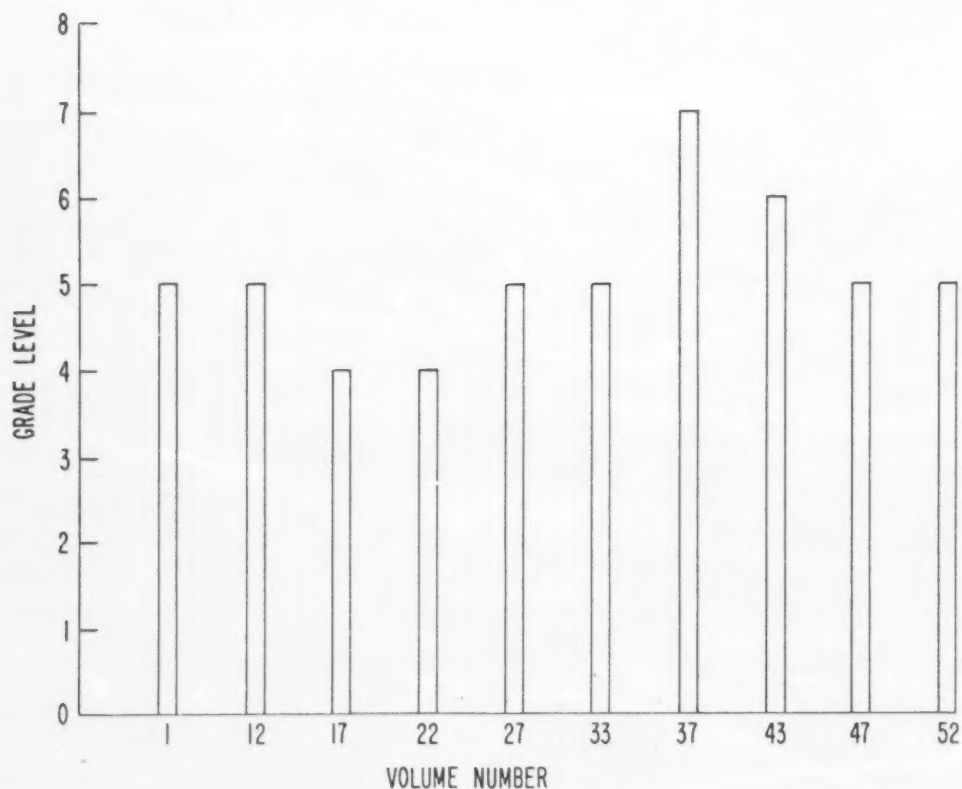
<u>Volume</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	Little House in the Big Woods
2	Little House on the Prairie
3	Farmer Boy
4	On the Banks of Plum Creek
5	By the Shores of Silver Lake
6	The Long Winter
7	Little Town on the Prairie
8	These Happy Golden Years

HARDY BOYS SERIES



<u>Volume</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	The Tower Treasure
11	While the Clock Ticked
16	A Figure in Hiding
21	The Clue of the Broken Blade
26	The Phantom Freighter
31	The Secret of Wildcat Swamp
36	The Secret of Pirates' Hill
41	The Clue of the Screeching Owl
46	The Secret Agent on Flight 101
51	The Masked Monkey
56	The Jungle Pyramid

NANCY DREW SERIES



<u>Volume</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	The Secret of the Old Clock
12	The Message in the Hollow Oak
17	The Mystery of the Brass-Bound Trunk
22	The Clue in the Crumbling Wall
27	The Secret of the Wooden Lady
33	The Witch Tree Symbol
37	The Clue in the Old Stagecoach
43	The Mystery of the 99 Steps
47	The Mysterious Mannequin
52	The Secret of the Forgotten City

overcomes high readability level, but low motivation demands a low readability level." It must be the teacher's judgement as to whether or not a student's interest or motivation will compensate for a higher readability level than the student would normally be able to cope with.

Although "interest alone cannot overcome reading disability (Spache, 1972)," the reading or classroom teacher should bear in mind that the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys and "Little House" series are of great interest to children today, as they have always been, and the "satisfaction these books offer seems to be real if not literary (Frank, 1969)."

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